

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCERhttp://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/336421_noelected23.html**Elections director should be elected***Last updated October 22, 2007 4:50 p.m. PT***By TOBY NIXON**

GUEST COLUMNIST

Voting yes on Initiative 25 this November will allow us to vote next November to change the King County charter to create a stand-alone Elections Department and an elected non-partisan director of elections.

On Oct. 10, the P-I Editorial Board opined that I-25 would "be a good discussion item" but then urged voters to say no. With all due respect, this issue already has been amply discussed; now it is time for action.

After the problems we had with elections in 2003 and 2004, two independent non-partisan panels reviewed King County Elections. One panel was appointed by the county executive, the other by the County Council. Both panels discussed the issues at length, and made recommendations about what we should do to avoid election problems in the future.

The Independent Task Force on Elections said, "An official elected in a non-partisan race with primary responsibility for conducting elections would increase accountability to citizens, be better able to educate and encourage citizens to participate fully in the electoral process, be a more effective advocate for improved technology and resources, and establish an independent elections system."

The Citizens Elections Oversight Committee said, "the CEOC recommends making the elections director an elected, non-partisan office. The CEOC is unanimous in recommending that non-elections functions be transferred to other county agencies, to create a stand-alone elections operation focused on one critical task -- conducting elections."

They also said that this would "increase public confidence," that it would "contribute to the independence and professionalism of the Elections Section," that it would send "a positive message to full-time election employees -- that their work is an essential, independent and non-partisan part of our democratic system of government and worthy of being headed by an elected official," and that those employees "would be better able to operate free of any appearance of political influence." And they said this "would help ensure continued public scrutiny long after the current elections controversy has ended, thus helping to avoid a repeat of the elections problems of the past."

I-25 does exactly what both the Independent Task Force on Elections and Citizens Election Oversight Committee strongly recommended.

The P-I Editorial Board says it wants elections to be run by a "highly qualified professional." The fact is that such professionals have been running our elections through all the problems we've had over the past few years. We elect our governor; we elect our judges, including the judges of the Washington Supreme Court; we elect the chief elections officer of our state and the chief elections officer of every other county in Washington. I trust King County voters to choose our director of elections as well.

The people of King County, not any charter review committee, established and control the county charter. King County voters signed a petition saying they wanted an elected director of elections. Voters should join them; vote yes on I-25 and make King County elections once again directly accountable to the people.

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